

## Air quality report card concerns residents

By Doug Murphy  
Staff Writer

There were more questions than answers after a presentation on air quality and the proposed South Mountain Loop 202 freeway last week.

The bottom line is that overall air quality in Maricopa County is getting better as newer vehicles and better formulated fuels hit the streets, the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team was told Feb. 23.

But when it comes to dust in the air, large particulate matter called PM 10 and small particulates called PM 2.5, because they are 2.5 microns or smaller, the only testing is county-wide, with no data on how a freeway would impact particulate matter on neighborhoods or schools.

On top of that, the federal Environmental Protection Agency has just identified Mobile Source Air Toxics that they say can result in serious health or environmental impact, but for which there are no national standards or testing models.

"Where is the forward thinking?" asked Melanie Pai after the presentation.

"You wouldn't build a school on a toxic waste dump. But parents allow kids to attend schools next to a health hazard," said Pai, founder of Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children, a grass-roots

organizations opposed to the freeway being built on Pecos Road near schools and homes.

According to Bill Vachon, a senior engineer with the Federal Highway Administration, there are no limits on how close a freeway can be built to a school.

Of the two types of particles in the air PM 10 is the obvious, while PM 2.5 is the more dangerous.

Maricopa County meets federal standards for PM 2.5 according to the EPA, but the monitoring and analysis is done countywide and is not site specific.

That and the mobile toxics concerned members of the advisory team that is studying possible routes for the freeway.

John Rodriguez, who represents the Lakewood Homeowners Association on the advisory team, was concerned about air quality and children's developing lungs.

The South Mountain Loop 202 passes within yards of five schools in Ahwatukee Foothills and depending on the route on the west side, another 3-5 schools.

Even though there have been no violations of the PM 2.5 standards and there are no standards for mobile toxics, advisory team member David Lafferty of Tolleson wasn't happy at the close

**more Air, see page 5**

## Air

from page 2

proximity of the proposed freeway to schools. He suggested that the freeway might have to be realigned to protect students' health, even if there aren't national standards that are violated.

Next week experts from the Environmental Protection Agency will be in Phoenix to speak with Arizona Department of Transportation engineers about how to take into account mobile toxics and what mitigation options there are.

The advisory team meets again Thursday at 5:30 at the Komatke Center, 51st Avenue and ST. John's Road in the Learning Center Hall.

On March 30 the team is expected to make a recommendation on the freeway route in the Laveen/Tolleson area between 51st Avenue

and the Loop 101 interchange.

A recommendation on the east side, in Ahwatukee Foothills, isn't expected until later this year or 2007.

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